

ליד פֿון טאָגבוך (1974)

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Poem from a Diary (1974)

Translated by Michael Steinlauf (2009)

Who will last?
And what will last?
A breeze,
a blindman's blindness when he's passed,
sea-sign,
strand of foam,
a cloud caught up on its way home.

Who will last?
And what will last?
A single sound,
creation-grassed,
greening and unbound.
A fiddle rose stands tall.

Seven grasses of the grasses
will understand it all.

More than all the stars
North-strewn down to here,
a star will last
that falls into nothing but a tear.
In its jug a drop of wine stands true.
Who will last?
God will last.
Not enough for you?

: 2010

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California Institute for Yiddish Culture and Language (CIYCL) Poetry Translation Contest.

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Avrom Sutzkever's "Lid fun a togbukh (Ver vet blaybn, vos vet blaybn)" has long been one of my favorite poems. It speaks directly to our deepest needs for meaning in a voice that's at once tragic and playful, so obvious and so veiled. I thought of it as the perfect poem. None of the existing English translations seemed to do it justice, and after unsuccessfully trying my own hand at it many times, I began to think of it as untranslatable. Last summer 2009 at KlezKanada, I was inspired in Dan Kahn's translation workshop to produce this English version.

Michael Steinlauf is a professor of Jewish history and culture at Gratz College near Philadelphia. His parents survived the Holocaust in hiding on Polish soil, his father in the Warsaw Ghetto. Michael is the author of *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (1997) and contributing editor to the *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (2008). He has long been active in Jewish memory work in Poland. He has lectured at the Krakow Jewish Culture Festival, taught in the Musicians' Raft program organized by the Borderlands Foundation in Sejny, and served as chief historical advisor and curator of modern Jewish culture for the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. He is currently working on a study of Y. L. Peretz as a cultural and political activist.
